

AN UNRECOGNIZED DENOTATION OF THE VERB *ḤSR* IN BEN-SIRA AND RABBINIC HEBREW

by

NORMAN M. BRONZNICK

Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey
New Brunswick, NJ 08903

The *pi^cel* of *ḤSR* appears in several midrashic passages with the meaning “to disgrace”, “to shame”. In the *editio princeps* and in the Venice edition of Gen. R. 65:20, 73:5, as well as in several MSS (cf. the critical edition of Theodor-Albeck, pp. 736, 737), it appears with this meaning in the following passage: ולמה נוגף . . . על שחיסרן ברבים שנאמר ועמכם עגלי הזהב אשר עשה לכם ירבעם smitten? . . . because he disgraced them in public, as it is said: And there are with you the golden calves which Jerobam made for you as gods” (Chr 13:8).

The verb appears similarly in a parallel passage in Lev. R. 33:5. However, so ingrained is the conviction that the verb *ḤSR* in such a context is to be taken as a scribal error for the commonly known verb *HSD* that Margulies in his critical edition of Lev. R. (p. 763) emends the text accordingly against the testimony of the London MS, which constitutes his given text, and against other MSS. It should be noted that in another parallel of the above passage (Ruth R. 7:12), the *editio princeps* has שחיסרם and the Venice edition has שמסרם, an obvious misprint or an editorial miscorrection.

A similar fate befell three other midrashic passages. One, in Exod. R. 30:10, where the *editio princeps* has . . . ושחיסרו אותו דתן ואבירם . . . בזה שחיסרתם אמר להם הקב”ה “When Dathan and Abiram disgraced him . . . God said to them, with the very words that you disgraced him . . .” Two, in *Pesikta R.* (sec. 42, ed. Friedmann, p. 177b): שהיו השלטונים והשלטונות מחסרות את שרה וקוראים לה עקרה “The male and female rulers used to shame Sarah by calling her barren.” Three, in *Šir hašširim Zûta* 1:5: התחילו חברותיה מחסרות אותה “Her friends started to disgrace her.” In all three instances the editors emend the verb in question to a corresponding form of the stem *HSD*, which is widely used with this meaning in Aramaic and also once in the Bible (Prov 25:10).

Finally, the verb *HSR* also appears with this meaning in Talmud *Yerūšalmī* (*Ketubbōt* 6:11), according to the Leiden MS, in the following passage: דלא מחסר לה בסתר למה נוטל מפני צער שמצטער עמה. While the exact import of the passage is unclear and is subject to various interpretations, all agree that *מחסר*, or its emended version *מחסד*, means "to shame". The passage is, however, best rendered as composed of a question and an answer: "Why does the husband receive [one third of the payment for "shaming" in case of injuries done to his wife] that do not show, since he does not see her shame? Because of the pain that he shares with her [in her shame]."¹ The lexica, blindly following the emended texts, ignore all the above attestations and thus fail to record the existence of this denotation for the stem *HSR*.

Additional attestation is also found in Samaritan Aramaic. In one of the versions of the Samaritan Targum (Tal, 1980, p. 119) *herpāi* (Gen 30:23), "my disgrace", is rendered by *hasrī*, a noun derived from the stem *HSR*.² As for the semantic route that led to this denotation, it is easily discernible. For the transition from a quantitative lessening, which represents the primary denotation of *HSR*, to a qualitative lessening, which is implied in the concept of disgracing someone by detracting from his dignity, is sufficiently reasonable in itself. Interestingly enough, Radak explains by means of this semantic transition the verb *אגרע*, which usually means "I will diminish", to denote in Ezek 5:11, in accordance with the needs of the context, "to detract from the dignity", i.e., "to disdain".³ Furthermore, this semantic transition operates in a similar fashion in a number of analogous stems, and this we shall now proceed to demonstrate.

1. There is one more attestation that might be cited. Commenting on the absence of the letter *vav* in the spelling of Ephron's name, when he took the money from Abraham (Gen 23:16), the rabbis in *Midrās Rabbā*, *ad loc.*, observe that *ḥisrō hakkātūb*, "Scripture diminished him." While it may merely refer to the loss of the letter, in the commentary *ʿēš yōšep* to Tanḥumā, *r'eh* 10, it is explained to refer to his loss of honor in the eyes of God. The correctness of this interpretation can be seen from a similar comment in *Yerūšalmī Kiddušin* 1:9, and parallels.

2. The Samaritan Targum to Gen 4:23 and Exod 21:25 renders the Hebrew noun therein for a "bruise" by *ḥasūrāh*. One might be tempted, as a result, to suggest that the semantics of *hasrī* for "my disgrace" be based on the assumption that disgrace was conceived as a form of psychological bruising. But, as we shall proceed to demonstrate, an entirely different semantics is operative in the use of the stem *HSR* for shaming someone.

3. It is worth noting that the noun *gērāʿōn*, derived from this stem, signifies in medieval Hebrew "disparagement". Cf. Levias (1914, p. 297) and other lexica, and cf. Radak to Ezek 16:30.

Commenting on Num 15:30, R. Elazar b. Azaryah in *Sifrê ad loc.* explains the verb *GDP* by making recourse to a contemporary Hebrew phrase: כאדם שאומר לחברו גדפת את הקערה וחסרת אותה, "like a person who says to his fellow, you wiped the plate and you diminished it." Here reviling and blaspheming God is viewed semantically as a form of diminishing and deprecating of worth.⁴

This use of the verb is also present in the talmudic phrase in *Abôdāh Zārāh* 35a, and parallels: ר' ירמיה מגדף בה ר' ירמיה should be rendered as "R. Yirmeyah belittles it," by finding it deficient and faulty.⁵

A second attestation of this semantic transition is to be found in the stem *PGM*. This stem is frequently used not only for quantitative lessening as, for example, in *Ketubbôt* 87b, but also for disgracing and discrediting. Concerning a guest who changes his place of lodging, the Talmud makes the following comment: פוגם ונפגם, i.e., "he discredits his host and he himself is discredited" (*Arakîn* 16b). The passive participle of the stem *PGM* is used interchangeably with that of *BZH* as, for example, in qualifying the noun *umānūt*, "vocation" (*Qiddūšin* 82b and *Yerūšalmī*, quoted by Lieberman in his *Tôseptā kipšūā*, 8, p. 983), denoting in either case "a disdainful vocation". The noun *pegam* is interchangeable with the noun *genay*, "shame" or "disgrace", and either one may be used as an antonym of *šebah*, "praise", as for example in the expression, "there are those who explain it in praise of . . . but there are those who explain it in shame of . . ." (cf. *Tanḥûmā*, ed. Buber, I, pp. 30, 218).⁶

4. The opposing view of Issi b. Akavya that the verb in question is to be understood as the equivalent of the one in the statement: כאדם שאומר לחברו גדפת את הקערה ולא שיירת ממנה כלום "like a person who says to his fellow, you wiped the entire plate and left nothing over from it," does not at all disagree on the basic semantics of the verb in question. Both agree that semantically this verb means to detract from God's dignity, but they differ as to the extent of this detraction. According to the opinion of R. Elazar b. Azaryah, he who acts brazenly against the Torah, which is the burden of the verse that is the subject of his comment, is equivalent to diminishing only part of God's dignity. Whereas Issi b. Akavya holds that his act is equivalent to depriving God of his entire dignity, as it were, and he is thus to be viewed as a total non-believer, as an atheist.

5. In a marginal note in S. Abramson's manuscript edition of *Avodah Zarah*, the connection is made between this phrase and the one in *Sifrê* to Num 15:30 cited above.

6. It is worth noting that the reverse uses of *HSR* are reflected in *ŠBH* as the latter denotes "to increase", "to improve" as well as "to praise". Barth's suggestion that the two denotations belong to two separate stems, the first being *ŠBH* and the second *ŠBH* (cited in *Addimenta to Aruch Completum*, p. 389) is thus unwarranted. Analogous to *ŠBH* is the verb *ŠP*, which also serves in both of these senses as suggested by Lieberman in his *Sifrê Zûā* (1968, p. 116).

A third attestation of this semantic transition is present in the stem $\dot{S}^{\circ}R$ whose primary meaning is "to be little". It is also used in the sense of "to be small in number" and "to be insignificant", as in Jer 30:19; Job 14:21; 2 Chr 24:24. But in Aramaic the $p\bar{a}^{\circ}el$ of this stem is used with the meaning "to shame" and "to disgrace", etc. It is so used regularly in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic, as recorded in the lexica (cf. Payne-Smith, 1903, p. 482) and in the Targum to Proverbs, which is an adaptation of the Syriac version, as for example in Prov 6:33; 18:3; 30:10, 11. It is also used in the sense occasionally in talmudic Aramaic as in the phrase ציער שליחא דרבנן (*Qiddušîn* 70b), which Rashi correctly explains that he disgraced a court messenger. The noun of this stem also has this meaning, as for example in the phrase לישנא דצעררא , which means "an expression of disgrace", since it appears in contrast to the phrase לישנא מעליא , which means "a nice (or, respectable) expression" (*Rôš haššānāh* 23b). This noun is similarly used in rabbinic Hebrew, where it serves as an antonym of *šebah* (*Ta'ānūt* 10b).

Interestingly enough, the verb $\dot{H}SR$ is used in Arabic with the meaning "to grieve", "to cause pain" (Wehr, 1966, p. 176). It is used likewise in Karaitic Hebrew, probably under the influence of the Arabic, with this denotation (Al-Ḳumissi, 1958, pp. 59, 78). Thus, combining the uses of $\dot{H}SR$ in Hebrew and Arabic, $\dot{H}SR$ emerges as the semantic equivalent of the stem $\dot{S}^{\circ}R$.

A fourth attestation of this semantic transition is represented by the $pi^{\circ}el$ of $B\dot{S}R$ as used in a rather enigmatic midrashic passage. Commenting on two verses in Psalms, wherein Edom, which in the rabbinic tradition is generally identified with Rome, is alternatively termed either as עיר מצור (60:11) or as עיר מבצר (108:11), the rabbis in Deut. R. 1:16 offer three interpretations, two of which follow: $\text{עיר שמצירה} \dots \text{עיר שהכל מבצרין אותה}$ R. David Luria *ad loc.* correctly notes that each of the two verbs employed in the first interpretation refers to the corresponding word in each of the two appertaining verses. However, all commentators are puzzled as to the exact meaning of the verb $B\dot{S}R$ as used in this context, and several possibilities are proposed, the most appealing of which is "to diminish", i.e., to weaken. While such a denotation might fit the assertion made in the first midrashic interpretation, it does not fit the alternative interpretation as it would yield the following incorrect assertion: The city that all diminish. Such a claim is contradicted by the fact that Rome was conceived at the time as an all-powerful state. To remove this obvious objection, the alternative interpretation was construed by some to read as follows: The city which all strive to diminish (cf. the English version

of the Soncino edition of *Midraš Rabbā*). But, needless to state, the introduction into the text of the crucial verb “strive” is an unwarranted addition and yields, at best, a rather forced construction.

Based, however, on the primary meaning “to diminish”, which this verb has in Aramaic, and also in Hebrew as in Ps 76:13, the *pi^cēl* of this verb is to be taken, in the passage under discussion, to mean “to disgrace”, “to despise”.⁷ Hence the first midrashic interpretation under discussion is to be rendered: “It is the city that oppresses and disgraces Israel.” And the alternative interpretation is to be rendered: “It is the city that all despise.” The last assertion is in full accord with the low esteem of Edom, as stated in Obadiah 1:2, “Behold I have made you puny among the nations, you are utterly despised,” which is interpreted in the Talmud (*ʿAbôdāh Zārāh* 10a) to refer to Rome. About Esau, the eponym of Edom, the rabbis in a comment on Gen 25:23 aver: “All the nations despise Esau and all the nations despise Israel”(Gen. R. 63:7). Thus the disdain in which Edom is held is, strangely enough, equal to that in which Israel is held. Elsewhere, the rabbis refer to Rome as an “unworthy kingdom” because it has neither a language of its own nor a script of its own, Latin thus being considered as a corruption of Greek (*Giṭṭin* 80a, and cf. Gen. R. 16:4).

The semantic route leading from “subtracting”, “taking away”, to that of “despising”, “disgracing” is apparently also present in the biblical stem *BZZ*, whose primary meaning is “to take away” as attested by its Arabic cognate (Wehr, 1966, p. 56) and as reflected by its synonym *ŠLL*. While the regular denotation of *BZZ* is “to loot”, it is also used with the meaning “to despise” as in, “Who despised (= *baz*) the day of small things” (Zech 4:10). The lexica (e.g., Mandelkern, p. 180) unnecessarily emend the vocalization of *baz* to *bāz* to have the verb derive from the stem *BWZ* rather than from *BZZ*. But it can be shown from the noun *baz*, as used in several instances, that the stem *BZZ* also signifies “to despise”. In Ezek 23:46 it is collocated with *zewāʿāh*, “horror”, and thus calls for a meaning that is compatible with “horror”. Also, the meaning of *baz* in that verse, which treats of the public punishment meted out to an adulteress, is to be taken, contextually, as “disgrace”. Likewise, in Ezek 36:4, where it is collocated with *laʿag* “derision”, *baz* must have a meaning, as already recognized in Targ. J., akin to “derision”. Similarly, the alternative noun *bizzāh* is also used for “disgrace” in Neh 3:36, as evidenced from the context and so, apparently, in Ezra 9:8.

7. In this connection it is worth noting that the verb *BŠR* with the noun “honor” as its object is used in Syriac to denote “to dishonor” as, for example, in the Syriac version of Ben-Sira 11:6; 26:28.

Finally, the use of *BZZ* with the meaning “to despise” in its various nuances is also present in its quadriliteral form *BZBZ* as in the phrase: נערים היו ובכוזו עצמן כקטנים, “They were young men but they degraded themselves as little children” (*Sôṭāh* 46b and cf. 48b).

Having shown that the meaning “to disgrace” for *HSR*, in midrashic Hebrew, has its semantic parallels in several other stems,⁸ we may now turn our attention to the second part of this paper, to show that *HSR* is similarly used in Ben-Sira. This will help illuminate several verses not only in the Hebrew Ben-Sira, but also in the Greek and Syriac versions as well.⁹

1. Ben-Sira 14:2:

אשרי איש לא חסרתו נפשו / ולא שבתה תוחלתו

Kahana (1937, *ad loc.*) renders the first stich as, “Happy is the man whose soul has not deprived him of hope.” Segal (1958, *ad loc.*) explains it to mean “whose soul did not hold him back from happiness and pleasure, and did not cause him pain through ill thoughts and feelings” (tr. from the Hebrew). Both interpretations are rather forced as, in each case, one indirect object or another needs to be supplied.

To conform to the Syriac version, where the phrase in question reads as “has not disgraced him”, Schechter and Taylor (1899, *ad loc.*) emend the verb in question to read חסרתו, which yields the identical meaning as in Prov 25:10. Ben Yehuda in his dictionary, p. 1664, cites the verse under discussion as emended without bothering to inform the unaware reader of the existence of the original reading.

However, in view of the attested use of the verb *HSR* in rabbinic Hebrew with the meaning “to disgrace”, no emendation is necessary. As for the import of the verse, it is worth noting that it parallels Job 27:6 as understood by Rashi and as rendered in the *JPS*, “My righteousness I hold fast and will not let go; My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.” Accordingly, the verse in Ben-Sira is to be understood approximately as follows: “Happy is the man whose soul (i.e., his conscience)

8. By applying this semantic transition, we may resolve a well-known crux in Judg 18:7, רבין מכלים דבר, which is emended by many to accord with the expression in verse 10: אין שם מחסור כל דבר (cf. Macintosh, 1984). Perhaps on the basis of the neo-Syrian, where *KLM* means “to rob”, i.e., “to take away”, a meaning which is apparently present in I Sam 25:15 as taken in LXX, no emendation is necessary, as *maklīm* may thus be the semantic equivalent of *maḥsôr*. Hence the usual meaning of the stem *KLM*, “to insult”, “to despise” is to be taken as a semantic transition from the basic denotation “to take away”.

9. Unless otherwise noted, the Hebrew version used below is the one published by the Academy of the Hebrew Language, Jerusalem, 1973.

has not disgraced him (i.e., reproached him because of his unworthy aspirations), and whose hopes (i.e., his aspirations) did not have to cease [as a result].”

2. Ben-Sira 35:12:

בעת שלחן אל תרבה דברים / ואם עולה על לבך דבר / ביראת אל ולא בחסר כל
Charles (1913, p. 426), accepting Smend's emendation of *kōl* to *lēb*, renders the verse as follows: “At table-time multiply not words; but if anything cometh up in thy mind, speak, in the fear of God, and not in foolishness.” The Greek version is unclear. Segal (1958, p. 204) renders it as “and not in sin and arrogance”.

Taking the noun *ḥōser* in the sense of belittling and disgracing, the verse will yield good sense as it stands. And what is more, it will clarify in consequence the Greek version. It is a common habit, while sitting at the table during mealtime, for people to engage in small talk, which frequently leads them to disparaging the actions and belittling the accomplishment of various persons. To avoid this pitfall, Ben-Sira advises his reader not to engage, to begin with, in excessive chitchat at the table. If, however, one gets an urge to talk, Ben-Sira exhorts: Talk about the fear of God, i.e., religious themes, and do not engage in belittling everybody and everything. The term “fear of God” often stands for religious knowledge and divine wisdom as, for example, Ps 19:10 and Ben-Sira 6:37. The Greek version which has “arrogance” is most likely a metonymic rendering of the Hebrew word meaning “disparagement”, since the latter is merely the result of the former; for an act of disparagement by a person is usually a function of an arrogant attitude (cf. Ps 123:24).

This semantic nexus is present in the Aramaic *LB*, which means “to insult” as well “to arrogate superiority” (cf. Jastrow, 1903, p. 1080). This will help explain the targumic rendering of the Hebrew *GDP* in Isa 37:23 and Ezek 5:16, which means “to revile”, by the Aramaic verb *RBRB*, which usually means “to boast”, “to act in a superior manner”.

3. Ben-Sira 30:39:

אחר עבדך יהי כ[מוך] / כי במשף [חסרונו]

The words supplied in brackets, for those missing from the damaged Hebrew manuscript, are based on the Greek and Syriac versions. Charles (1913, p. 432) offers תחסרהו as an alternative *Vorlage* for חסרונו, and renders the verse in English as follows: “Hast thou an only servant, let him be as thyself, for thou hast need of him as thy very self.” Segal

(1958, p. 215), following Charles and others, suggests that the Hebrew **במשך** is a scribal error for **בנפשו**, which he takes to mean "at the risk of your life"; i.e., if you will lose an only servant, danger may ensue to your life. Not only is it highly unlikely for a scribe to mistake the familiar **בנפשו** for **במשך**, a rare word whose meaning has not been ascertained as yet, but also the thought resulting from the emendation and interpretation is highly unreasonable. And Segal, surprisingly, fails to supply even an inkling of the danger to life that the loss of an only servant might possibly cause.

Taking, however, the missing word to mean "your disgracing him" as based on this use of the verb *HSR*, the verse will lend itself to a construction yielding an acceptable thought, which will fit the tenor of the passage as a whole. But first we must redefine the word *ʿehād*, which is commonly taken to mean "an only one", and then we must determine the meaning of **במשך**.

The reason for the contrast between the preceding verses, in which the master is advised to treat his slave harshly, and this verse in which he is urged to treat his slave as himself, is not, as commonly assumed, due to the supposed fact that the preceding verses concern a master who possesses more than one slave, while this verse treats of a master who has an only slave. If this were the case, the passage would be devoid of any moral or intellectual value, and we would be left with an exhortation of crass and simplistic pragmatism unworthy of Ben-Sira.

In reality, the contrast is not at all between one and many slaves, as indeed the preceding verses, using the noun in the singular, also deal with an only slave. The difference, however, is that the preceding verses deal with the ordinary slave, who needs a firm hand, whereas this verse is concerned with the extraordinary, unique slave, who is to be treated as an equal. This comports with Ben-Sira's exhortation elsewhere: An intelligent slave, love as yourself (7:21; 10:25).

The word *ʿehād* is to be taken, as in several biblical verses, with the meaning of special, distinguished, extraordinary or unique. In Gen 26:10 *ʿahad hāʿām* refers to the king and thus means, as rendered in the Targum, *ad loc.*, the distinguished of the people. Similarly, *ʿahad* in Gen 49:16, according to Gen. R. and Rashi *ad loc.*, is taken as "the outstanding of". Israel is termed *gōy ʿehād* (2 Sam 7:23), meaning "a distinguished nation" (Num. R. 3:6 and cf. Tar. J. *ad loc.*). There are many other instances in which the rabbis take *ʿehād* to mean "special" or "extraordinary" as, for example, 1 Sam 1:1 (Num. R. 10:12) and Num 28:4 (*Megillāh* 28a). The phrase *par ʿehād* (Num 7:15) is inter-

preted in *Sifrê ad loc.* as a bull, one such that there is “none like it in the entire herd”.¹⁰

Also the Aramaic *laḥādā*, used in the Targum as the equivalent of the Hebrew *meʿōd* “very”, “exceedingly”, is rooted in the denotation of outstanding singularity that *ḥādā* “one” has (cf. Jastrow, 1903, p. 425). It is worth noting that there is a calque of this Aramaism in the Hebrew use of *leʾaḥat* in that sense (*Menāḥôt* 18a).

Now to the task of determining the meaning of *במשך*. Fortunately, help is available in Samaritan Aramaic. In rendering the biblical *meqallēl* “reviles” in Exod 21:17 and *megaddēp* “blasphemes” in Num 15:30, the Samaritan Targum uses *משך*. And for the imperfect of *QLL* in Lev 20:9, a variant in Tal’s edition of the Samaritan Targum has *משך*. Apparently the stem of this verb is the geminate *ṢPP*, which is used in Hebrew (cf. Gen. R. 22:6; 25:3) and in Palestinian Aramaic (cf. Schulthess, 1903, p. 212; Jastrow, 1903, p. 1619) for “puny” or “contemptible”.

We are now ready for an entirely new conception of the verse under consideration. Reading *במשך* as *משך*, an interchange that is of common occurrence in manuscripts, and taking this verbal form as an active participle of the *hipʿil*, a most fitting exhortation will ensue. The verse is thus to be rendered as follows: “If you have an outstanding slave, let him be as you (i.e., treat him as your equal), for as one who blasphemes [God] is he who disgraces him.”¹¹ This assertion is now similar in tenor to the verse, “Whoever mocks the poor blasphemes his Maker” (Prov 17:5), and to the one in Ben-Sira, “As one who blasphemes is he who despises his father” (3:16).

10. The phrase *lēb ʿehād* (Ezek 11:9) may thus be taken to mean “a special heart”. This construction will mitigate the argument for emending it to *lēb ʿahēr*, “another heart”, to accord with the LXX version.

In this connection attention should be drawn to the irony in Asher Ginsberg’s arrogation of this epithet as his pen name, ostensibly as a humble designation meaning “one of the people”, without realizing that in the Bible this epithet conveys the very opposite meaning.

11. To complete the interpretation of the verse, we must turn to the Syriac version since the second part of the verse is partly missing from the damaged Hebrew MS. The second part reads in the Syriac as follows: “And do not fight with the blood of your soul.” This probably harks back to Job 31:13–15, “Have I despised the cause of my manservant, or of my maidservant, when they contend with me? . . . Did not He made him in the womb as He made me, and fashioned us in the same womb?” This rendering is based on LXX, and its implied message is: Do not fight with your slave because both you and he were fashioned in a similar womb (cf. Kahana, 1937 *ad loc.*). The same applies to the Syriac Ben-Sira, “Do not fight with your slave the blood of whose soul is similar to yours.”

4. Ben-Sira 19:7:

From hereon we shall attempt to show that the Hebrew stem *HSR*, signifying “disgrace” underlies in a number of instances the Greek and Syriac versions, but went unrecognized and was misconstrued in consequence. In the Syriac version, the above verse reads: לעלם לא נחסדך תתנא מלתא ואנש לא נחסדך. “Never repeat anything [you heard], and no one will disgrace you.” However, instead of the Syriac נחסדך, the Greek version has *elattonōthē*, a verb whose Hebrew *Vorlage* is derived from the stem *HSR*. Thus, both Kahana and Segal in their Hebrew editions of Ben-Sira reconstruct the Greek as *yehasrekā*, without giving its meaning in their explanatory notes. The translators from the Greek into English, unaware that the Greek represents a literal rendering of the original Hebrew *yehasrekā*, denoting “will disgrace you”, render the Greek version in various ways to accord with the Greek use of this verb. However, based on the Syriac version, it should be rendered “will disgrace you” in conformity with the denotation of the underlying Hebrew.

5. Ben-Sira 20:2:

According to the Greek version, literally rendered, this verse reads: “How good is to reprove rather than to be wrathful, and a confession spares [a man] from a lessening.”

Smend (1906, p. 180), followed by Kahana and Segal, correctly conjectures that the Greek genitive noun *elattōseōs*, “a lessening”, is based on the Hebrew *Vorlage* *hsr* (= *hōser* or *heser*) which, according to Smend, was a misreading or a scribal error for *hsd* (= *hesed*), meaning “disgrace”. Segal (1958, p. 120) suggests that the Hebrew *Vorlage* be kept, but is to be given the meaning “deprivation”, i.e., “punishment”. However, such a denotation for this noun is unattested, nor is it appropriate to the context. The verse seems to be saying that since it is advisable for someone wronged to reprove his wrongdoer, a wrongdoer should therefore, in anticipation of such a reproof, confess to the wrongdoing and thus be spared the disgrace of being reproved.

However, no emendation is necessary to obtain the desiderated denotation, as Smend proposes, since the Hebrew stem *HSR* is used with such a denotation in midrashic Hebrew.

6. Ben-Sira 20:11:

The Greek version, literally rendered, has: “Sometimes comes a lessening through honor, and there is one that has raised his head from a low estate.”

Here, as in the preceding citation, the Greek noun *elattōsis* is used, which prompts Smend (1906, p. 183) to offer the conjecture that the Hebrew *Vorlage* *ḥsr* (= *ḥeser* or *ḥōser*) constitutes a misreading or scribal error for *ḥsd* (= *ḥesed*), meaning “a disgrace”. Segal (1958, p. 120) accepts the conjectured Hebrew *Vorlage*, but gives it the meaning of “want” and “poverty”. However, given such a meaning, the antithesis between *ḥōser* in the first stich and “raised his head”, which idiomatically stands for “received honor”, in the second stich is thereby attenuated. To obtain the desiderated antithetic meaning “dishonor”, as Smend rightly sought, no emendation of *ḥōser* is necessary since, as shown, the stem *ḤSR* has such a denotation.

7. Ben-Sira 20:21:

The Greek version has: “One, through want, is hindered from sinning, and when he resteth he will not be troubled” (Charles, 1913, p. 386).

The Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek noun for “want” is, as correctly assumed by Kahana and Segal, a noun derived from the stem *ḤSR*. Segal (1958, p. 124) takes this presumed noun to mean “lack of money”, i.e., “poverty”. While this might be a reasonable construction of the verse as it stands, it does not, however, fit the context. The verse which follows, “Another destroys his soul through shame, and ruins it through a foolish countenance” (translated from the preserved Hebrew text, and similarly in the Greek version), seems to stand in contrasting opposition to the preceding verse; but it does not do so if we accept the construction given to the verse under consideration by Charles, Segal and others.

However, interpreting the Hebrew *Vorlage* as signifying “disgrace”, in conformity with the attested meaning for the stem *ḤSR*, the first stich of the verse under discussion states a moral truth in praise of the sense of shame: There is one who because of shame is hindered from sinning. Now the next verse states, in contrast, that, at times, the opposite may be true: A man may destroy his soul (i.e., commit a sin) out of shame (i.e., because he may be embarrassed to profess and perform his religious beliefs and practices in public).¹²

12. In this rendering the expression “destroys his soul” fits the context admirably as it is so used in the wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 6:32, 8:36) to describe the disastrous effects on one’s soul resulting from moral transgressions. Segal, in his attempt to maintain the contrast between this verse and the preceding one, interprets this verse to mean that out of shame to reveal his poverty, one may “destroy his soul”, i.e., “suffer mortal illness”. But, as said, in the wisdom literature the expression “destroy his soul” has reference to spiritual and not to physical harm.

This contrast appears elsewhere in Ben-Sira. A lengthy passage, containing instruction on the subject of shame (41:16–42:8), opens with the following statement: “For not every kind of shame is meet to retain, and not every kind of abashment is to be approved.” This must have been a favorite theme of Ben-Sira, for he repeats it elsewhere: “For there is shame that brings sin, and there is shame [that brings] honor and grace” (4:21).

8. Ben-Sira 22:3:

In the Greek version this verse reads: “Shame to a father in the begetting of a fool, and a daughter is born to his loss” (cf. Charles, 1913, p. 390).

Here, too, the Greek noun rendered as “loss” is the same as the one in 20:2, 11. The Hebrew *Vorlage* to be recovered from this is, again, *hōser* or *heser*. This is further corroborated by the Syriac version, which has the noun *husrenā*. Segal (1958, p. 132) explains the Hebrew *Vorlage* to mean “loss”, i.e., “poverty”. Realizing, however, that *heser* parallels synonymously the noun “shame” in the first stich and hence must have a similar denotation, Segal hesitatingly suggests that *heser* is to be emended to *hesed*. But, as in the preceding verses, no emendation is necessary since *heser* may be used to denote “disgrace”. As to the nature of disgrace that the birth of a daughter might cause, Ben-Sira describes it graphically in 42:9–11, and it is undoubtedly this that he has in mind in the verse under consideration.

9. Ben-Sira 26:2:

Kahana, followed by Segal, in recovering the underlying Hebrew of the Greek version, renders the verse in Hebrew as follows:

אִישׁ חֵיל חָסַר מַעֲנִי / וְאָנָשִׁי בִּינָה אִם יִתְרַפֵּסוּ

If indeed the first stich represents the original Hebrew *Vorlage*, it should not be construed, as generally done, to mean: “A man of wealth who suffers want because of poverty”, as this would make for poor parallelism with the second stich. To obtain proper parallelism, the subject of the first stich should be rendered as “a man of virtue” or as “a man of ability” (cf. Prov 31:10), and then *hāsēr* should be rendered as “is disgraced” in accordance with this attested denotation for the stem *HSR*. Now the parallelism of the verse is brought into clear focus, reading as follows: “A man of ability who is disgraced because of poverty and a man of understanding who suffers contempt”.

10. Ben-Sira 34:21:

In the Greek version this verse reads: "A scanty bread is the life of the poor; he who deprives him thereof is a man of blood" (Charles, 1913, p. 436). The Syriac has לחמא דחסדא in place of "a scanty bread", which Smend (1906, p. 310), followed by Charles, renders as "bread of mercy".

Winter (1976, p. 244), in contrast, renders the phrase as "bread of ignominy". This rendering commends itself for the following reason. The use of *ḥesdā* in Syriac for "mercy" is a loanword from the Hebrew and, to indicate this, it is usually written with an aspirated *dh* (cf. Payne-Smith, 1903, p. 150). Thus the verse is to be construed as follows: Bread of ignominy (i.e., charity food) is the life of the poor; He who withholds it from him is a man of blood. Properly explicated, this verse seems to state that although charity usually causes feelings of shame to the poor, it cannot serve as an excuse for its withholding. For the latter is far worse because, charity constituting the life of the poor, withholding it from him would be an act tantamount to murder.

Now the underlying Hebrew of both the Greek and Syriac is *ḥeser*, which the former renders as "scanty" and the latter as "ignominy", a denotation that this stem has. Interestingly enough, both are characteristic of charity as poignantly expressed in a rabbinic prayer, which became part of grace after meals in the sefardic rite: "Do not deliver our food through the hand of human beings, whose donations are paltry, but their disdain is abundant" (*Yerūšalmī, Berākôt* 4:2). Hence both the Greek and the Syriac are acceptable translations of the underlying Hebrew *ḥeser*, as each is an apt depiction of the nature of charity.

11. Ben-Sira 34:31:

In the Syriac version (31:38, 39), the verse reads:

במשתיא דחמרא לא תכס רחמך . . . מלא דחוסרנא לא תאמר לה

"At a banquet do not rebuke your friend . . . a word of *ḥusrenā* do not say to him." In the partially preserved Hebrew text, the corresponding word for *ḥusrenā* is *ḥerpā*. Smend (1906, p. 285), followed by Segal (1958, p. 202), takes the Syriac either as a misreading of an underlying Hebrew *ḥesed*, read as *ḥeser*, or as an inner corruption in the Syriac version from *ḥusdā* to *ḥusrenā*. However, in view of the attested use of *ḤSR* to denote "disgrace", these fanciful speculations become unnecessary. Both versions are based on an antecedent Hebrew text that had *ḥeser*, which was later replaced by *ḥerpā*, but was rendered literally, if incorrectly, as *ḥusrenā* in the Syriac version.

12. Ben-Sira 41:6:

According to the Syriac version, this verse reads: "From an unrighteous son dominion will perish, and want shall ever abide with his seed" (cf. Charles, 1913, p. 466). The noun rendered as "want" as it appears in the Syriac version, is *husrenā*. In the margin of the Heb. Ms B, the equivalent word is *rīšm*, whereas in the Masada fragment the word is *herpāh*, "disgrace", which corresponds to *oneidos* in the Greek version.

Segal (1958, p. 277) conjectures that the *Vorlage* of the Greek version was *hesed*. Smend (1906, p. 383) is uncertain whether the Syriac *husrenā* means "poverty" or it is to be taken as a scribal error for *husda*, meaning "disgrace". Yadin (1965, p. 19) hypothesizes that there existed Hebrew versions in which the word in question was *hesed* "disgrace", but was misread by the Syriac translator as *heser*, and hence *husrenā*. However, an occurrence such as this is hardly likely given the fact that the stem *HSD* is commonly used in Syriac for "disgrace", and thus any translator into Syriac would have immediately recognized it as such.

However, all the above conjectures are unwarranted since, as shown, the Hebrew *HSR* may be used for "disgrace". If conjecture we must to account for the differences in the several versions of Ben-Sira, it is best to posit the existence of *heser* for the original recension of Ben-Sira as militated by the Syriac version. Subsequently, this noun was interpreted, literally but wrongly, in the margin of MS B as *rīšm*, "their proverty", but substituted correctly for the sake of clarity in the Masada fragment by its biblical equivalent *herpāh*, "disgrace", as rendered in the Greek version.

This will also help explain the variants in 37:9 יאמר לך מטוב דרכך וקם מנגד להביט רישך. "He will say to you 'how good is your course,' and will then stand off to watch your poverty." It is self evident that *rīška*, 'your poverty' in Hebrew MS B, is contextually inappropriate as being a nonsequitur. The Syriac has, instead, צערך which Segal (1958, p. 286) correctly renders "your disgrace". Here, too, we must posit an antecedent *heser* in order to account for both the preserved Hebrew text as well as the Syriac version.

In conclusion, before accepting easy solutions based on emendations, due consideration should be given to the fact that the verb *HSD* is nowhere to be found in the Hebrew Ben-Sira, and that the reading of *hesed* in the only instance where it is used as a noun for "disgrace" (41:2) is inconclusive. For a close examination of the facsimile of the Masada fragment, published by Yadin (1965), will reveal that it may as well be read as *heser*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al-Ḳumissi, D. 1958, *pitrôn šenem ʿāšār*. Ed. I.D. Markon, Jerusalem.
- Charles, R. H. 1913. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*. Oxford.
- Jastrow, M. 1903. *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli etc.* New York.
- Kahana, A. 1937. *hassepārîm haḥiṣōnîm*. Tel Aviv.
- Levias, C. 1914. *Dictionary of Hebrew Philological Terms*. Leipzig.
- Macintosh, A. A. 1984. "The Meaning of MKLYM in Judges 18, 7," *Vetus Testamentum* 35:68–77.
- Payne-Smith, J. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Oxford.
- Schechter, A. and C. Taylor. 1899. *The Wisdom of Ben-Sira*. Cambridge.
- Schulthess, F. 1903. *Lexicon Syropalestinum*. Berlin.
- Segal, M. Z. 1958. *sēper ben-sirā haššālēm*. Jerusalem.
- Smend, R. 1906. *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach*. Berlin.
- Tal, A. 1980. *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch*. Tel-Aviv.
- Wehr, H. 1966. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Ithaca.
- Winter, M. 1976. *A Concordance to Peshitta Version of Ben-Sira*. Leiden.
- Yadin, Y. 1965. *The Ben-Sira Scroll from Masada*. Jerusalem.